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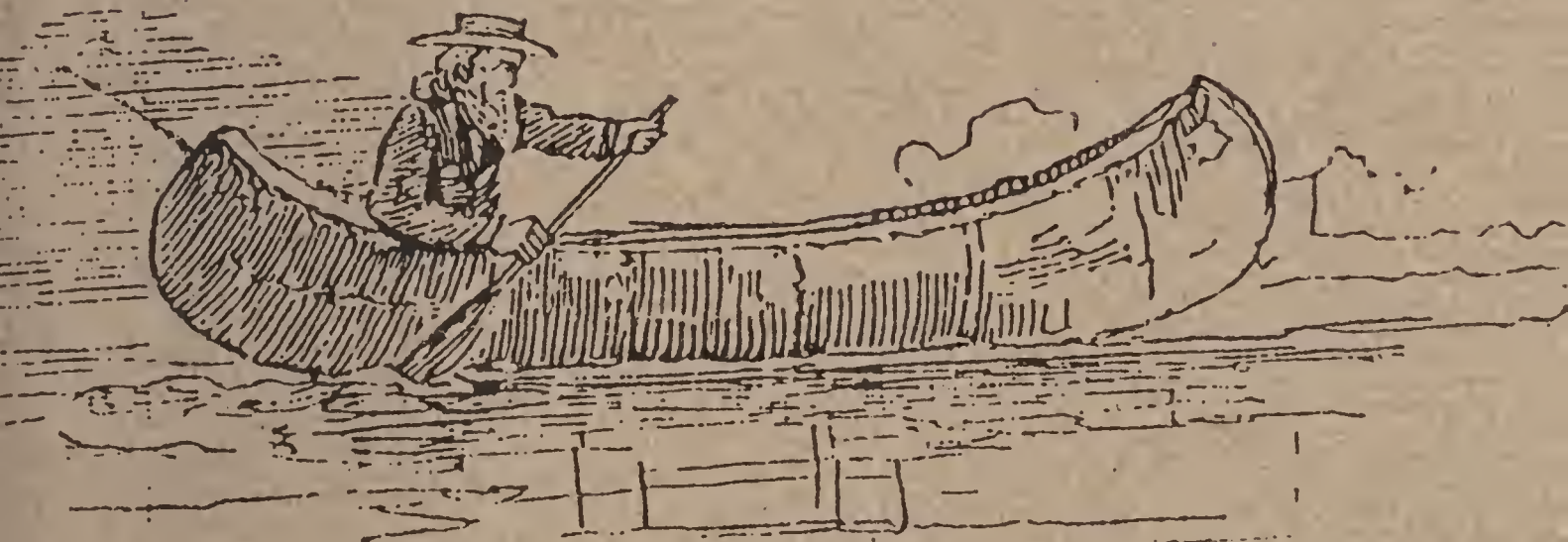




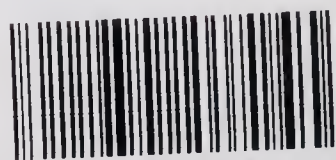


A FACSIMILE EDITION
AFTER 100 YEARS
OF HIS FIRST BOOK

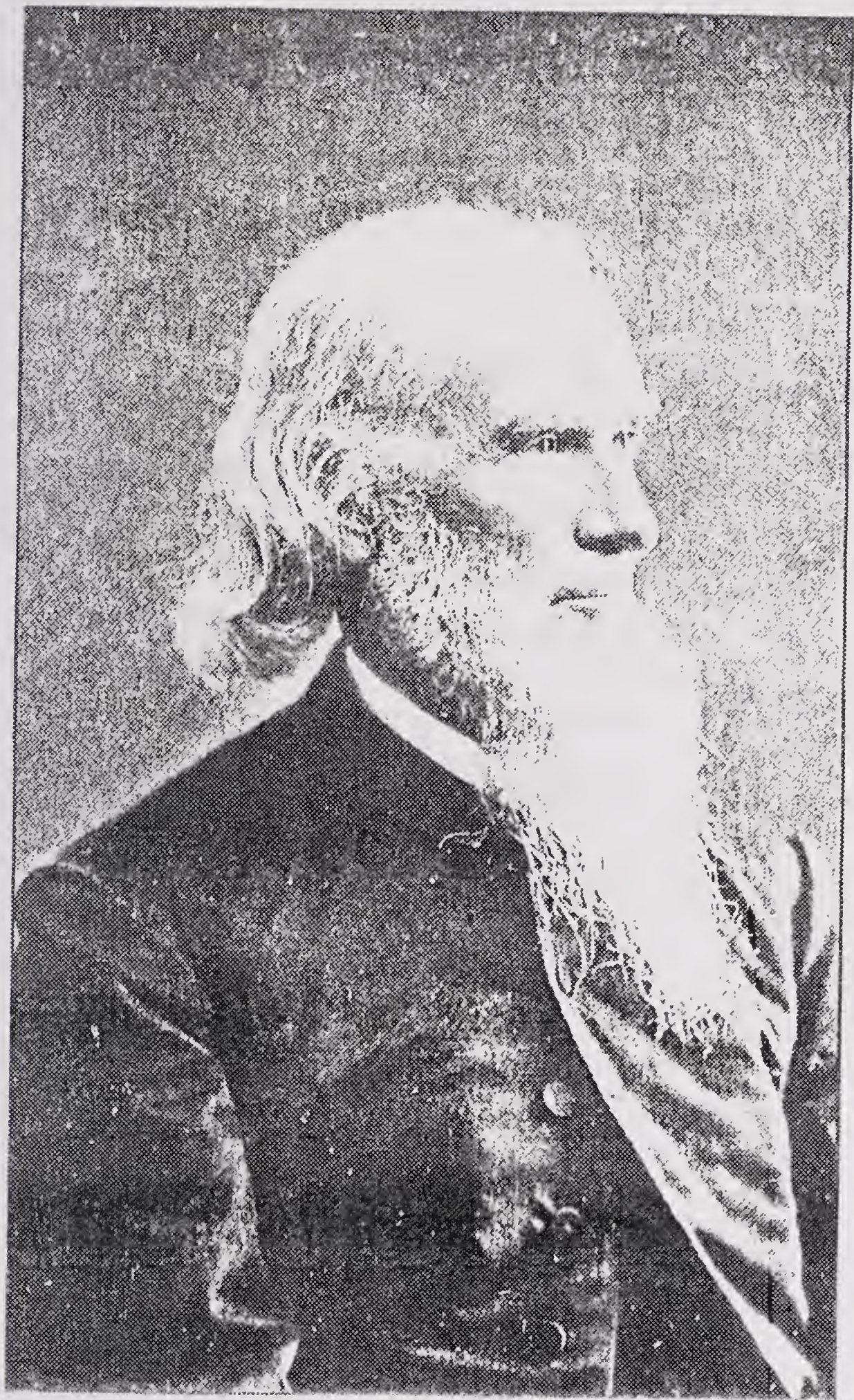
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SHELDON W. PRIEST



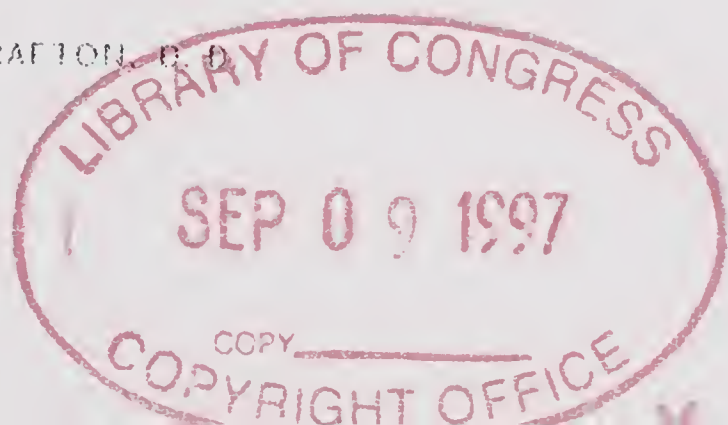
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REV. MARK TRAFTON, D.D.



THE
BIRCH CANOE.

A FOREST IDYL.

BY
REV. MARK TRAFTON, D.D.

BOSTON
MCDONALD & GILL COMPANY
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A FACSIMILE EDITION
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Motto.

"For Nature ever faithful is
To such as trust her ministries.
When the forest shall mislead me,
When the night and morning lie,
When sea and land refuse to feed me,
"I will be time enough to die.
Then will yet my mother yield
A pillow in her greenest field,
Nor June roses scorn to cover
The clay of their departed lover."

Introduction.

The author of this beautiful poem is too well known to need any formal introduction. "The Birch Canoe" is not, as some may imagine, the child of poetic fancy, but a real excursion, made by the author on the upper Penobscot during many a summer vacation. The incidents and scenery so graphically described are real, and much of the night talk around the camp-fires are of legends familiar to those who have wandered through the forests of northern Maine.

Dr. Trafton has spent many a summer vacation amidst the charming scenes here so felicitously portrayed. And the reader will confess that many passages in this bright poem will not suffer in comparison with Longfellow's best productions.

But time warns our poet that the forest is not henceforth his place of rest. The graceful human birch which, for eighty-two eventful summers, has been impelled along the stream of life by the dip of Time's golden oar, will soon make its final landing. Then, amidst the bowers which skirt the banks of that mystic river, where camp-fires cease to burn and earth's legends give place to eternal realities, he will rest forever in

"That summer land of song."

Boston, 1892.

W. McDONALD.

THE BIRCH CANOE.

A Forest Idyl.

I.

Hail, Mother Nature ! in thy wildest moods
I love thee best — the rolling thunder peal,
The howling winds, the sombre, primal woods ;
Cloud shadows, which o'er shimmering meadows
steal ;
Night's star-gemmed queen, upon her ebon throne ;
And deep heart musings with myself alone.

II.

Far from the crowded city's noise and strife,
Fashion's mad follies, sorrow's piercing moan,
The crashing enginery of hurrying life,
Mirth's vapid smile, the hollow, dying groan,
In the cool forest, where blest quiet reigns,
Out of the world, with all its doubtful gains.

III.

Off for the forest ; blankets, gun and rod —
 With John of Nicatou, full six feet four ;
'Three choice companions, who have often trod
 The yielding moss, and love the torrent's roar ;
Leaving all care behind, away we hie
Where the Penobscot's lakes in beauty lie.

IV.

Our dancing birches skim the quiet lake,
 Graceful as swans upon the swelling ocean ;
'The lithesome paddles scarce a ripple make,
 As on we glide, the poetry of motion ;
And list — the song, "My bark is on the sea,"
Floats on the air, in some wild melody.

V.

You have not seen a birch? Well, see one, then,
 While to your fancy drawn with a free hand
'The germ of naval architecture ; when
 Art rose to meet Necessity's demand,
She stripped the birch tree, culled the cedar light,
Bound with spruce roots, the seams pitched water-
 tight.

VI.

Sharp at the ends, with thwarts of ash across,
 With graceful curves from center to her points ;
Lightness the aim, while yet of strength no loss ;
 Yielding to motion, yet no creaking joints ;
No nails, nor bolts, no ringing hammers fall ;
The artist's tools, a hatchet, knife and awl.

VII.

To board, is not so safe as is a step
 Into a flat-boat or a seventy-four ;
While, by your guide's firm grasp, she's steady kept,
 Her broadside pressing close the shelving shore,
One foot you lift and set it in the center,
Then raise the other quickly—thus you enter.

VIII.

Low on the bottom seated, limbs extended,
 Your paddle grasping firmly, shout, "All right !"
Now off she shoots, with little force expended,
 Over the waters like a ray of light ;
Or, in the stern erect, John sends her dancing
Like a wild duck, up the bold rapids glancing.

IX.

Penobscot, "rocky river!" how I love
Thy waters, calm, or broken into foam.
Far distant fate may cause my feet to rove,
Yet back my heart comes to its primal home;
From thee, now parted many a weary year,
Whose murmuring music soothed my infant ear.

X.

Arno, or Tiber, or dark Danube's stream,
Or winding Rhine, with castle-crowned heights,
Or sluggish Thames, or gently gliding Seine,
Or ancient Nile, which dusky Copts delights,
Their charms so oft the minstrel's lyre have strung,
Joy of my youth, while thine are yet unsung.

XI.

Child of the fleecy snows! whose infant birth
Is where rough Winter holds his lengthened sway,
Whose kingly mandate checks the rippling mirth
Of the young brooklets, leaping on their way,
Thy infant weakness, fed by nursing rills,
Bursts through rough rocks and towering northern
hills.

XII.

And thou hadst sway, in all thy strength alone
 And wealth of beauty, ere man's voice was heard ;
 Thy soothing music mingling with the tone
 Of wintry tempests, or the summer bird ;
 The moose laved in thy waters, and the brood
 Of fluttering sea fowl skimmed thy rushing flood.

XIII.

Roll on, grand river ! still thy waters course
 And fret, and boil along thy rocky shore,
 Hastening to reach again their primal source,
 Where they shall rest, and chafe thy banks no
 more.
 Thus on 'Time's stream I glide, and long to be
 At rest upon that far-off, quiet sea.

XIV.

Yonder, behold ! a nation's ruins lie ;
 On that small island live the poet's Los ;
 Sockbasin-swasson; Neptune, I espy,
 Sabbattis, Porus, and a score of Joes,
 With swarms of little Los of varying hue,
 From coal-black eyes to those of sapphire blue.

XV.

Lords of these forests wide, how sadly changed,
 Crushed by the white race's civilizing hand !
Once proudly free, they through these dark wilds
 ranged,
 Erect, athletic, a fierce conquering band,
'The lordly Tarratines, the Mohawk's foe,
Whose wild, hot natures changed to this so low.

XVI.

Their lands are lost, their prestige and their pride,
 Confined now to the islands in the river ;
No more their hunters through the forest stride,
 With faithful dog, and bow, and bristling quiver ;
No eagle plumes the summer breezes rustle,
But see, instead, the banded hair and the bustle !

XVII.

For them the State has built a modest church,
 Where a French priest mumbles some wretched
 Latin,
'The sanops now and then construct a birch,
 'The squaws now weave some baskets and some
 matting,
While Lo is happy as a lord, and frisky
With his tobacco and a jug of whiskey.

XVIII.

And this is what is done for that poor race,
 The full return for all that we have taken ;
 Their sober lives our vices now displace ;
 Their robes of furs and plumes they off have
 shaken ;
 They stroll around, like clumsy booted mousers,
 In some white dandy's swallow-tail and trousers.

XIX.

Oh, for the savage life in forest wide,
 Where the moose ranges and the panther
 screams !
 In the light birch to skim the silver tide ;
 To spear the salmon in the rushing streams ;
 To fling the shout of freedom on the air,
 Wrapped in warm furs, and wearing one's own hair.

XX.

Is this civilization, thus to be
 Robbed of one's independence ; to assume
 Manners and modes which e'en the blind may see
 Are artificial as a borrowed plume ;
 To wear the tyrant Fashion's gyves, and bend,
 And fawn, and smirk, and lie, to gain an end ?

XXI.

To give the hand, where one cannot the heart ;
 To crush one's native manliness ; to tread
In others' steps ; to learn the baleful art
 Of hollow flattery, or be styled " ill bred ? "
Rather than this, I would to forests go,
Don the deer's hide, and be the poet's Lo.

XXII.

Enough ! We pass ; our graceful bark canoe
 Waits us at Nicaton and frets the tide ;
Our modern modes have borne us thus far through.
 There on the bank appears each ready guide ;
Our city dress aside we quickly cast,
Don the loose blouse, and gladly leave the past.

XXIII.

Two rivers here unite and join in one ;
 The natives seeing, cried out " Nicaton "—
" Union," the twain hence in one channel run,
 As two fond hearts, joined by the nuptial vow ;
And wild Penobscot, in his dashing pride,
Woos Matagamon as his blushing bride.

XXIV.

Here Quakish takes us to her quiet breast,
 'The least of the grand sisterhood of lakes;
Now the chafed waters find a moment's rest,
 Ere the wild stream o'er Rockabema breaks;
So silent, save the distant waterfall,
Or o'er the lake the loon's wild mocking call.

XXV.

Night in the forest. Silence and shadows meet,
 Our camp-fires flicker on the trembling leaves;
'The wakeful whippoorwill in tones so sweet
 All the long night in saddened cadence grieves;
'The short, sharp bark of prowling fox is heard,
And hollow hootings of night's dismal bird.

XXVI.

Not marble palace, with its gilded dome.
 And rich mosaic pavement, can compare
With this, our simply furnished forest home,
 Free from restraint, and close, polluted air:
Here we discuss and fix our future plan,
And taste the freedom of primeval man.

XXVII.

Books we have few, yet many storied leaves ;
 No gamin's crying, "'Ère's yer morning *Times* !"
No fear of burglar who by night relieves
 Some poor plethoric soul of surplus dimes ;
Here, quiet by our campfire, we propose
Each guide a tale relate, ere evening close.

XXVIII.

'The lot is Ben's, but now he pleads excuse,
 Is "low in spirits," pressed by painful thought ;
But Henry urges, "Tell of the Lunk-soos,
 The 'Indian devil,' which you fiercely fought
Back of the mountain yonder — this you can."
He blew a puff of smoke, and thus began.

BEN'S STORY.

It was early in October,
When the leaves were dead and falling,
When the days were growing shorter,
When the nights were long and chilly ;
I had started out exploring
For the winter's cut of timber,
For a company of loggers.
 All alone I went, yet fearless ;

Started as I often had done,
Taking only what was needful ;
With my knapsack on my shoulders,
With my lines and hooks for trouting,
With my blanket and provisions ;
In my belt my knife and hatchet,
Light and keen to cut my camp wood.
Thus I started with old Hero,
He my only tried companion ;
Oft we ranged the woods together,
Oft together had been hunting,
Spent the winters with the loggers ;
Never dog so wise and knowing,
Never dog so true and faithful,
Never dog so full of courage ;
Fear I never felt, nor anxious,
Tramping through dark, tangled forests,
Through dark nights of storm and tempest,
Needing never chart or compass,
Needing never stars or landmarks ;
Never care or forethought needing,
Saying only, " Camp now, Hero,"
And at once he led me to it.
Camping now where night o'ertook us,
Lopping some o'erhanging branches,
Bed at once, and shelter gave us ;
With our campfire burning brightly,

Flashing out its mimic fireworks.
Oft I heard the startling outcry
Of the dismal owl at midnight,
Or the wild and angry howling
Of the prowling wolf at midnight ;
Heard, but felt no fear or terror
While I watched the changing shadows
Of my campfire weird and fitful,
Hero by my side so watchful.
Where is Hero? Do not ask me ;
Were he living, you would see him.

Down his cheeks the tears were dropping,
On his flowing beard were falling,
As he paused and wiped them quickly ;
Then resumed : —

Forgive this weakness.
Now you know why yonder mountain
Brings this sadness, this depression :
That I'm here, I owe to Hero,
Faithful friend, who died to save me.
Up the East Branch we had traveled,
To the north side of Katahdin,
Looking for a grove of timber,
Pine and spruce which rumor placed there.
You, who've climbed the mountain yonder,

Saw far down the ragged north side
Deep ravines, so wild and dismal,
Filled with broken rocks and windfalls,
Through which roared the frothy torrents,
Shaded, gloomy, dark, unearthly ;
There the red men say Pomola,
The bad spirit, holds dominion,
There he holds his court infernal ;
Greatly dread they those dark gorges,
Shun them as they fear Pomola ;
Fear him as they fear the devil.

Day by day I had been tramping,
Now through groves of smooth-barked beeches,
Where the nuts were thickly falling,
Nuts the squirrels store for winter,
While the yellow leaves were rustling ;
Now through masses of dark hemlocks,
With tall spruces intermingled ;
Living thing I saw but seldom.
Now and then I flushed a covey
(Of wild partridge, or of wood-duck ;
Then, a startled deer saw leaping,
Hero on his track loud yelping ;
But exploring, and not hunting,
To such game gave slight attention.

I had located my timber,
Blazed the trees for bounds and limits,

Marked the favored streams for landing,
And, all done, had started homeward.
But I marked a change in Hero ;
On the second day I noticed
He was not so free and playful,
Leaped not far ahead, as usual,
Treeing bird or chattering squirrel,
Scattering the dry leaves about him ;
But, instead, he followed after,
Kept close to me in my footsteps,
Looking often back and growling,
Bristling, and his ears erecting,
Sidewise turned his head and listening,
While his eyes were wild and burning.
Noting this, I oft looked backward,
Nervous grew, and apprehensive
That behind me lurked some danger,
That some foe was on me stealing ;
Felt a heart oppressive, sinking,
As we ofttimes feel an evil,
A foreboding of some danger.

Yet I paused not, but pressed onward
Through the thick, o'erbranching hemlocks,
Hoping soon to strike a meadow
And emerge from this dread shadow
Into clear and cheerful sunlight.
How I longed for my good rifle ;

Loosened in my belt my hatchet,
Loosed the straps, too, of my knapsack,
Ready for a race or climbing.

Hero growled ; I heard a snapping
As of twigs or yielding branches,
Heard the branches bending, swaying,
As when heavy winds are rising ;
Turned and looked—not ten yards distant,
On a huge limb, crouched a cougar ;
His tail his yellow sides was lashing,
Like living coals his wild eyes burning,
Showing his long fangs and growling.
Hero saw and sprang towards him ;
With a shriek that shook the forest,
Launched the fiend, like lightning, on him,
Rent him as you'd rend a leaflet.
But that short encounter saved me.
Dropping now my knapsack quickly,
Up a maple sapling near me,
Sprang and reached the lower branches ;
Threw my left arm round the sapling,
With my right hand grasped my hatchet.
Leaping ten feet up, the monster
Ran out on a limb, and crouching,
With a yell that oft now wakes me,
Drove he like a streak of lightning
Full upon me, sidewise swaying ;

Met him my descending hatchet,
Down the keen blade on his shoulder
Crashing fell ; the hot blood spouted,
But his claws laid one leg open
As he passed five yards beyond me.
Roaring now with pain and madness,
Back he leaped ; I ne'er saw motion
In a living creature like it,
Reached the limb and sprang upon me,
In his jaws my right foot crushing ;
Down upon his head descending
Came with such good aim my weapon
That one eye gushed from its socket ;
Down he dropped, with yell of anguish.

But my wounds were bleeding freely,
Faint I grew, almost despairing ;
'Thought of home and of the loved ones,
'Thought of all my sinful failings,
Lived an age in those few moments ;
'Tried to pray, but brief my thinking.
Life was sweet—I roused my courage,
Nerved me for a last encounter.
He, my foe, now moved more slowly,
Mounted to his perch, not vanquished,
For who ever slew a "Lank-soos?"
Who o'ercame an "Indian devil?"
On he drove, his right claws striking,

Tearing all my thigh asunder.

I with my last force his forearm
Struck ; he dropped. I heard a baying,
Rifles crack, a shout—I knew not
Whence, or whom—I sank in shadows.
I woke at last in camp, surrounded
By my rescuers, some hunters,
Tending me with all compassion.

His tale was done ; with bated breath
Each listener sat, and pale as death.
Eyes peer into the forest gloom.
Ha ! what's that cry ? A wakeful loon.
Each saw his rifle cap all right,
Rose, heaved a sigh, and said good-night.

XXIX.

Morn'g in the forest. Hushed the balmy air ;
The quivering leaves hang pendent on the bough.
Lo ! old Katahdin's distant summit, where
The early sun gilds all his noble brow
Like some old giant rising from his sleep,
While down his sides night's stealthy shadows creep.

XXX.

The leaping brooklets sparkle in the rays,
While dashing down the mountain's rugged side

To the calm lake, o'er which a silver haze
 Floats like a veil upon some blushing bride ;
And list ! a splash, as up a trout springs high,
Shows his bright sides and snaps the hovering fly.

XXXI.

The heavy night dew drops drip from leaf to leaf
 Nature's rich balm which she for man distils,
A sovereign panacea for the grief
 Which city care the throbbing bosom fills,
So cool, so pure, so full of lusty health,
Exhaustless source of true, substantial wealth.

XXXII.

Oh, who would spend life's brief and fleeting day
 In the thronged streets of cities ? jostled there
By hurrying crowds each rushing on his way,
 Breath hot with fever, hearts sunk in despair,
Where a mad frenzy burns for godless gains,
And fickle fashion in proud grandeur reigns.

XXXIII.

A hollow, heartless, artificial life,
 All bright without, all rottenness within.
Unequal battle, fierce, yet gainless strife,
 Where Virtue sinks before the giant Sin ;
Where manhood, conscience, self-respect expire,
Wrapped in the quenchless flames of passion's fire.

XXXIV.

The crowded theaters each night ablaze,
Where mimic life in tinsel thin appears,
Where vice in mask meets the admiring gaze
And sorrow's semblance fills the eyes with tears,
While real suffering stalks each crowded street,
'Treading its weary way with bleeding feet.

XXXV.

O simple youth ! who seek the city's mart,
Leaving the fields and forests rich and rare,
'To go to struggle where the laboring heart
'Throbs with the pressure of a weight of care,
'The young, fresh life exhausted in its prime,
And hope's bright sun goes down ere evening time.

XXXVI.

Few are our wants ; why, then, this lifelong strain?
And brief our days ; why shorten them with
haste?
Bitter our lot ; why, then, augment the pain?
'True gain is small ; why, then, this reckless
waste?
'The siren Pleasure sings but to decoy,
And drops the poison in each cup of joy.

XXXVII.

Come from the city which proud man has made ;
 Come to the country which God made for
 man ;
Come where the rich, green carpets all are laid ;
 Come, see the fullness of His wondrous plan.
Food, drink and air supplying all your needs,
Come to the forest, ye whose torn heart bleeds.

XXXVIII.

How the pulse quickens in this forest air ;
 The bounding heart exults in fullest glee ;
Age calls back youth ; hope laughs at dark despair ;
 The weary brain from throbbing pains is free.
The sinking spirits feel the rising tide,
And stooping forms stand up in youthful pride.

XXXIX.

The morning calls. We leap from fragrant beds,
 Rush down the bank and seek the gliding river,
Beneath translucent waters plunge our heads,
 Inhale the inspiring air and bless the Giver.
Then join our voices in a matin song,
Till echoes wake and the glad strains prolong.

XL.

But now the order comes, "Break camp;" we start,
 Our tents we strike, and baggage snugly pack,
 The birch is launched, we joyfully embark;
 Like well-trained soldiers, who, their arms in
 stack,
 Hear the loud bugle call, "Stand to your arms,"
 We start to explore Lake Pumadumcook's charms.

XLI.

Through the north twin we reach this glorious lake,
 Smooth as a mirror, while the rising hills,
 Clothed in dark green, a splendid border make,
 Sending the tribute of their rippling rills,
 While some huge bowlders on the distant shore
 Seem white-winged shallops passing slowly o'er.

XLII.

The morning zephyrs bear a rich perfume;
 We rest upon our paddles to inhale
 Odors such as from vineyards in full bloom,
 Or blest Arabia's richly scented gale;
 And see, the lake seems bound by snowy shore,
 Where the white lilies sweetest perfumes store.

XLIII.

The noisy loons, with wild and clamorous cry,
Gather in groups, scared by the paddles' plash ;
Vainly our marksmen draw a bead to try
Their vaunted skill,—they vanish at the flash ;
Then rise far distant, shake their dripping wings ;
Their mocking laugh far o'er the water rings.

XLIV.

Mark that lone duck, whose eyes the lake explore,
Sleepless, alert, to sense all dangers nigh :
Her half-fledged brood feed near the sedgy shore,
She sees the foe, and sends a warning cry ;
Instant with wings and feet they speed away,
Lashing the waters into blinding spray.

XLV.

Dipping our paddles we give rapid chase,
Our birches swiftly through the waters glide,
Still on they speed, it seems an even race.
They tire, the mother now flies far aside ;
She seems disabled, all her arts she tries
To turn upon herself the hunters' eyes.

XLVI.

In vain ; she sees for them the race is lost,
But not her love ; she gives a cry and flies ;
At once, like pebbles on the waters tossed,
The brood, thus warned, beneath the water
dives,
While, as a speck, far on the distant shore,
The mother sinks — we see the flock no more.

XLVII.

Left, not forgotten ; she will surely come
Back to her loved ones when the danger's past ;
Hark ! even now we hear the ringing hum
Of her swift wings, to them returning fast.
Her scattered young beneath the surface rest,
Waiting the call to gather to her breast.

XLVIII.

We call this instinct — nay, 'tis reason's light.
Instinct provides for nature's plain demands,
Defense in danger, or escape by flight,
But fails in strategy, foresight, plans ;
And thus she reasoned, " If I flee, may be
The foe will leave my young, and turn on me."

XLIX.

What wealth of beauty hidden in these wilds,
Shut in from artist's or the poet's eye !
Here summer revels, autumn sadly smiles
To the dull woodman passing heedless by.
Sublimest solitude, and scenes so fair,
No cities' splendors can with these compare.

L.

Here, o'er these lakes, long centuries ago,
The roving savage pushed his birch canoe ;
Through these dark forests roaming to and fro,
Vengeance or venison alone in view.
A hundred years will change these sylvan scenes,
The whistling engine drown the eagle's screams.

LI.

High noon ! and list : the welcome murmurs rise
Of rushing waters o'er the ragged stones ;
The long-sought inlet greets our searching eyes ;
We land, and dinner for our fast atones.
Then round the rapids our light birches take,
And launch again upon a lovely lake.

LII.

Three placid lakes here lie, joined to each other
 By roaring rapids and long dark lagoons,
 Called "the Joe-Mary," but if Joe was brother,
 Lover, or husband, our wisest sage assumes
 No skill to solve ; tradition license takes
 To call the trio "the Joe-Mary Lakes."

LIII.

Yet let us fancy Joe wooed Mary here,
 Or may be drowned her, or may barely be
 That Mary jilted Joseph, when a tear
 Oozed from his eye, and formed this inland
 sea.
 But, wooed or lost, beneath this summer sheen
 No poet's eye ere saw a fairer scene.

LIV.

Night's shadows fall. We seek a sheltering isle,
 Clad in dark evergreens, with pebbly shore ;
 Supper and song our past day's toils beguile,
 Night broods upon the heated earth once more,
 Our campfires blaze, upon fresh boughs reclined,
 The lot is drawn the evening tale to find.

I.V.

John draws the fatal lot — his modest pride
Mantles his manly cheeks ; he does not smoke,
So lacks that inspiration on his side ;
Yet very gravely, not designed a joke,
Says, " What I may rehearse to-night shall be,
'The sober truth, and not a phantasy."

JOHN'S STORY.

I shall relate what oft was told
By aged Indians of old,
Of a fair maid, whose deathless name
By her pure love is linked to fame.

On Deipskencag's bold eastern shore,
A ragged cliff hangs beetling o'er ;
Rich, crimsoned mosses on its face,
'The dark, wild whirlpools at its base,
Boiling and surging round and round,
A depth no plummet yet has found ;
So wild, no Indian ventures nigh,
But silent, shoots his swift birch by.
'They say above the roaring flood
Is heard a shriek that chills the blood,
'This legend still the red men keep,
And call that cliff the "Lovers' Leap."

Long years before the white man came,
A terror was the Mohawk's name ;
It stirred the blood, it raised the fears,
When breathed in a Penobscot's ears ;
While mothers hushed the infant's cry
By whispering, " 'The Mohawk's nigh !"
From the St. Lawrence oft was made
By these fierce bands a murderous raid
On the brave Tarratines below ;
Forced from their hunting grounds to go,
From these grand lakes were backward driven,
From lands the Manitou had given,
They ventured scarce to launch a birch,
They hardly dared for game to search ;
Crowded and crushed, their spirits broke,
They groaned beneath the Mohawk's yoke :
They sullenly retire, hard pressed,
And find at Nicatou brief rest.

Years passed. One winter day a scout
Brought word the Mohawk's bands were out,
In camp by Millinocket's lake,
Southward intend their raid to make.
Aroused, the Tarratines prepare
To march and meet their foe-man there ;
They pass wild Rockabema's tide,
Pass Quakish on its northern side,

'Then turning north press on all night
Led by the pole star's steady light.
'They see, as morning brightly broke,
'The foemen's campfire's curling smoke ;
'That splendid lake, from shore to shore,
Solid and smooth was frozen o'er.
'They camp ; but when the morn's first beam
On old Katahdin's brow is seen,
'The scouts the stealthy foe descry.
Painted and plumed, now drawing nigh,
Silent, in single file they show
One hundred strong, but moving slow,
For on this smooth and glassy plain
Hardly their footing they maintain ;
Heedless they march, they little dream
A watchful eye their force has seen ;
Stealing like wolves upon the fold,
'They hope to strike their foes of old
With torch and tomahawk a blow
Which leaves not one their fate to show.

Ambushed, the Tarratines abide ;
Blankets and packs are cast aside ;
Quick to each foot is bound the skate,
Each heart is hot with burning hate ;
'The bow and tomahawk they seize,
Leave with a yell the sheltering trees ;

On the hard ice the irons ring,
Agile as birds upon the wing
They sheer, they wheel, halt or advance,
Like movements in the mazy dance.
The war-whoop give, then on they fly ;
The foe flings back the wild war cry.
Surprised, appalled, the Mohawk band,
Crowded together, make a stand ;
They string and bend their bows in vain,
The whistling arrows thick as rain
Pierce harmless the impassive air,
Or cut the ice like ploughman's share ;
While circling round the skaters fly
Like meteors in the midnight sky,
And shrill and sharp each bow-string rings,
The arrow through the crisp air sings,
Singles and seeks its destined mark,
Piercing a hated Mohawk's heart.
Now swifter wheels the circle round,
Nearer, still nearer, draws the bound ;
The open ranks are closing fast,
The bow they drop, the hatchet grasp ;
With one wild yell of deathless hate
They close — each Mohawk met his fate.
Slain or fast bound the warriors lay,
The victors strip and scalp their prey,
Then homeward march in proud array,
Exultant in the well-fought day.

At Nicaton the setting sun
His daily race had hardly run,
When echoing far the forest through
Was heard the welcome "scalp-halloo."
With scalps and captives safe returned,
Each savage heart with triumph burned,
With reason, for that crushing blow
Has laid the haughty Mohawk low.
The tribe now wait the coming day
To wake the wildest revelry,
When through the gauntlet's torturing course
Each flying wretch they swiftly force ;
Or, bound against the fatal tree,
The mark for youthful archery ;
Or, in the slow, consuming fire
To glut the savage's baleful ire.

Now rose the crackling watchfire bright,
Flashing far round its lurid light ;
Exhausted by the hard-fought day,
Lost in deep sleep each warrior lay ;
The guarded captives safely bound,
And night and silence reign around.

Now, gliding by the camp-fire's flame,
The chieftain's daughter softly came.
Graceful her step as a young doe,

His only child, he watched her grow
In budding beauty day by day,
His only solace, since he lay
Her mother's wasted form away.
Among the captives of the fight
One only struck her startled sight.
'That manly form at once she knew,
His eagle eye a quick glance threw ;
The crimson o'er her fair cheek spread,
A flush, then, pale as sheeted dead.
The reason of the late raid, she
Reads like an opening mystery.
'Twas a fond lover's artful wile
To catch once more a maiden's smile ;
His purpose, by a night surprise,
To set this star in northern skies.
'They loved ;—hereditary foes
May feel the shaft which Cupid throws.
They once had met : one summer's day
Through forest shades she took her way,
Plucking the wild flowers blooming there,
Weaving them with her raven hair.
Then in the stream that murmured past,
She blushed to see her visage glassed.
'Twas now the sultry midday hour,
She felt the heat's oppressive power ;
Near by a noble hemlock stood,

The gloomy monarch of the wood ;
Its pendent branches swept the ground
And spread refreshing shade around.
Here in this cool, inviting bower
She paused to pass the noontide hour ;
A fan, composed of oaken leaves,
Calls to her cheek a cooling breeze ;
Humming some wild and plaintive air,
She seems a wood nymph resting there.
Soothed by the water's droning tone,
Sleep had her mantle o'er her thrown.
A startling scream ! She wakes to see
A wild-cat on a neighboring tree
Crouched for the leap ; his burning eyes
Flash fire ; in vain the maiden tries
To fly ; he drops his head to spring,
When sudden, from the whistling string,
An arrow swift as lightning flew,
Piercing the monster's vitals through.
She swooned ; but when again she woke,
What wondrous vision on her broke !
An Indian youth knelt by her side,
Whose dress proclaimed a stranger tribe.
Her senseless form he to the wave
Had borne, with which her brow to lave ;
The fierce beast on the bank lies slain ;
The youth his bow resumes again.

Majestic in his port he stood,
A youthful chief of Mohawk blood.
She saw it all ; her eyes grew dim,
She felt she owed her life to him ;
Her lips would bless him, but she knew
Nothing of Mohawk tongue ; but who
That ever felt love's witching spell,
But knows it needs not words to tell ?
Her eyes too well the truth betrayed,
While his gave to the blushing maid
Assuring sign. Enough ; they loved,
And mutely sealed the vows approved.

A captive now among his foes,
'To-morrow to his death-stake goes ;
She marked the lodge where he lies bound,
With stealthy step the place she found ;
'The watchfire there is burning low,
'The ghostly shadows come and go.
She lifts the curtain — there between
His guards her lover's form is seen.
'Their usual watch they fail to keep,
And wearied now are locked in sleep.
His bonds she severs ; he is free !
Now rising on one bended knee,
'The gleaming knife she passes o'er ;
He strikes ; his guards will wake no more.

As antlered buck which hears the hounds,
Seizing the maid, away he bounds.
No foot than his was found more fleet,
A double motive wings his feet ;
It nerved him in the fatal strife,
'The love of maiden, now of life.
'The river's frozen bosom crossed,
'They soon in forest depths are lost ;
'They cross the Millinocket's stream,
On Quakish saw the moonlight gleam,
O'er Ambegegigis urge their way,
Reach Deipskencag at close of day.
That tall cliff overhangs its base,
And oft when wearied in the chase
A cool, secluded, spacious cave
A shelter to the hunter gave.
Here, now, they rest ; he knew the pack
Of hungry wolves were on his track.
Short rest, but while a watch he kept
'The weary maiden calmly slept.

Soon as the morning flushed the sky
His ear detects the warning cry
Of baying hound ; the foe is nigh ;
For them no chance is left by flight,
'The leading foe-man full in sight.
He looked upon the sleeping maid,

And can he leave her thus betrayed?
He lifts her in his arms, and now
Seeks the tall cliff's o'erhanging brow.
The headmost foeman knew him well,
The forest rings with murderous yell,
His death song rises on the air,
Not coward fear, but calm despair.
He clasps the maiden to his breast,
Her beating heart to his is pressed;
A score of bow-strings sharply ring,
A score of arrows leave the string,
But ere one shaft had found its mark,
They leap into the waters dark;
His quavering death-notes rising o'er
The wintry torrent's sullen roar.
And oft the boatmen passing hear
Sounds which their bosoms thrill with fear.

The fire is low, the tragic tale is o'er,
We seek our fragrant beds to rest once more.
One, thoughtful, murmured as he passed along,
"Ah! yes; a woman's love is wondrous strong."

The morning breaks. On every mountain head
Blazes and burns the day-god's banner red;
The fleecy clouds that fleck the bright'ning sky,
Like doves, away on purple pinions fly.

The rising vapors from the quiet lake
Weird shadows cast and forms fantastic take.
"These heavy mists," the guides low speaking say,
"Foretell a rain before the close of day."
And see ! Katahdin, though long past the dawn,
His nightcap from his head has not yet drawn ;
Those whistling flocks which o'er the waters speed
Seek some lagoon where quiet they may feed.
Yon awkward heron marks the rising day,
Spreads his broad wings and slowly sails away.
The heavy night dew drops drip from leaf to leaf,
As sorrow's bitter drops from eyes of grief ;
The crackling camp-fires rise, the curling smoke
In spiral columns wraps the spreading oak.
O cheerful scene, exhilarating hour !
A stoic's heart must feel its thrilling power.
Our souls, disburthened in a place like this,
Exult, nor wish for higher earthly bliss ;
No griefs to soothe, no want to be supplied,
But breakfast, and the cook will that provide ;
What though no plate but tin adorns our board,
No modern luxuries with our frugal hoard,
No cringing butler at our elbow waits
To catch our nod, and change our scarce soiled
plates ;
What though no board, but, seated on a log,
Each takes his tin and helps himself to prod !

We need but this—life's tempting luxuries bring
Increasing wants; from one a thousand spring.
Had we the silver—then we want the safe;
'Then at the income tax we fret and chafe.
Had we the luxuries—then the doctor waits
'To smooth the way through Hades' gloomy gates.
Or flocks of servants—mistress scolds and fumes,
Numbers the napkins, daily counts the spoons;
Servant of servants and a slave of slaves,
Must be the soul who such surrounding craves.
Hail, forest life! with no encroaching care,
Our simple wants, a shelter, food and air.
'The boughs the first; from sparkling lake and wood
We draw unchallenged our supply of food.
We wing the duck, in vain his rapid flight;
We lure the trout from mountain torrents bright;
Fritters, which John with scidlitz powders raised,
Relished by all, by all unsparing praised;
A rasher, roasted on a pointed stick,
With steaming Mocha, fragrant, strong and thick.
'Talk of French cooks, of Soyer and de-Blot,
Of "Chinese bird nests," or the Turk's "pillau,"
Paté de foie gras, or the esteemed "ragout"—
All sink before our steaming muskrat stew.
Hail, sylvan scenes! hail, freedom from the chains
Of tyrant Fashion, where she ruthless reigns!
Here to the few remains a chosen place,

Where ne'er is seen the Grundy's painted face ;
Far, far removed from Wall Street's babel din,
Where Jenkins never shows his shaven chin ;
With thoughts above the gains of paltry pelf,
And, self-sustained, man dares to be himself.

Hark ! "All aboard !" the ever-welcome cry ;
We seize our traps and to the waters hie ;
Early we start, for ere the day is o'er
Four splendid lakes we cross from shore to shore.
Off all together, four canoes abreast,
Plying our paddles with an Indian's zest.
The rushing outlet's stream anon we reach ;
Again debark, and track the rocky beach ;
Or, when impeded by the foaming flood,
The shore we leave and try the tangled wood,
O'er rocks, and roots, and logs, through marshy
brakes,
Through shaky bogs, his way each slowly takes,
While down the rocky stream the cautious guide
The lightened birches o'er the rough rocks glide.
We reach the lake, now smooth the waters lie,
Embark again and swift our paddles ply.
The third is crossed and now again we reach
Familiar spot—old Pumadumcook's beach.
But ah, how changed ! the dark scud wildly flies,
Thousands of white-caps meet our anxious eyes ;

'The rain-clouds roll along the leaden sky,
'The white gulls scream their storm-forewarning cry ;
We turn the glass to scan the distant shore,
In doubt to venture, or to camp once more.
Within a jutting point we sheltered lay,
Our dancing barks seem eager for the fray.
As the trained steed restrained by curb and rein,
Paws the hard soil and snuffs the embattled plain,
'The rein now loosed, he neighs a wild "ha ha,"
Flings himself wildly on the tide of war,
'Thus, our impatient barks the waters ride,
Plunge, rise and roll, and dip the swelling tide.
"We'll try !" cries Priest, and dips his paddle deep ;
'The birch, like startled doe, with reckless leap
Cuts the rude billows like a swan at play,
Flings from her plunging bows the snowy spray ;
Another follows, and another yet,
While John and I still undecided sit ;
Balance at once the birch and chance for life,
If mingling in this elemental strife ;
Both are unwilling to confess to fear,
Yet feel 'tis cowardly to linger here.
Are others swamped ?—to aid we should be nigh,
Like friends to rescue or like heroes die.
Far out like cockles on the white-capped plain
The birches rise in sight, now sink again.
We dip our paddles, swift our light birch speeds

Through the thick mist where our last comrade leads.
Up the long lake the rising south wind roars,
The rain from heavy clouds in torrents pours ;
We strain our eyes to see our struggling friends,
Each plays the man and to his paddle bends.
Now in midlake we hold our wave-tossed way,
Hard on the seas or yield and bear away ;
We reach the lee of a broad, sheltering isle,
The smoother waters former fears beguile.
John's brawny arm now gives tremendous sweeps,
The startled birch like hunted dun-deer leaps ;
A race for life, six lengthened miles across,
While the wild winds the tumbling billows toss.
We gain ; we near them holding on their course,
Each plies his paddle with redoubled force ;
We're coming up ; we closely press the rear,
Excited now, we send a ringing cheer.
"A race ! a race !" we shout ; they catch the cry.
"A race it is !" the distant tones reply.
We shout a challenge to the fleet entire ;
By pleasant jibes we fan ambition's fire.
We pass the first and bantering call to know
If, wearied out, they would not have a tow.
Soon passed another on the flying track,
We shout to learn why they are going back.
Then as the last into the rear is thrown,
We ask the strangers when they left their home.

Up through Jack-cheatus' devious pass we glide,
In Ambegegig's land-locked bay now ride.
Our tents are pitched with Nature's quiet blest,
We here prepare to pass the day of rest.

A SABBATH SONG.

The morning breaks, the storm is o'er ;
 'The resting, tranquil waters lay
 Within this narrow, sheltered bay,
Glassy and bright, from shore to shore.

And hark ! from the dark, slumberous trees
 Nature's grand anthem richly swells,
 So soft, so sweet, like silver bells
Floating upon the morning breeze.

The air, the woods, the waters, call
 To every living, sentient thing
 Their choicest gifts of song to bring
To God, their Author, all in all.

We want no human temple now,
 The rich groined arch, the sculptured stone,
 The pealing organ's thunderous tone,
The surpliced priest to bend and bow.

All — all is temple — God in all,
On every thing the stamp divine,
On scented lily, towering pine,
In echoes of the waterfall.

God ! how the grateful bosom swells,
While gazing on yon brightening sky,
That awful presence seems so nigh,
We bow where the Eternal dwells.

These solitudes His presence fills,
As in eternity alone ;
Ere morning stars, or sung or shone,
He sat on the eternal hills.

'Tis God alone ; created hand
Is not in all this treasured good ;
Mountains and rivers, rocks and wood,
Rise, run and wave at His command.

And we, here meeting far, remote,
His treasured riches to enjoy,
Our thoughts, our words, our powers employ,
To join with these one grateful note.

Unworthy, aye, the least of all,
Though clothed with this immortal thought ;
Our tribute, least of all that's brought,
Shaded by sin, we silent fall.

Ye mountains rising by His might,
Ye forests moving by His breath,
Ye leaping cascades from your depth,
Ye lakes now sparkling in His light,

Join all, one glorious song to raise,
Blending with choral powers above,
Who glow and burn with seraph's love,
Hail ! Lord of all, Ancient of days !

LVI.

Once more the waters call us, and the trees
Wave a glad welcome as we sally forth ;
The lake is stirred, kissed by the morning breeze,
As o'er it we press onward to the north ;
Now clearer show Katahdin's channeled sides,
Cut, gashed and tortured by the torrent's slides.

LVII.

Wild Deipskeneag's bold rapids strike the eye,
Sheer down a hundred feet the waters pour,
O'er ragged rocks which fling the spray on high,
Hushing all other sounds with thunderous roar ;
Silence was frightened from this forest shade,
Since first this torrent had its channel made.

L.VIII.

We land and carry by — a toilsome task ;
 A huge black bear puts in a prior claim,
Stops the first guide, as if he fain would ask
 The bold intruder, "Whence and by what
 name?"
Happy for him, or may be for the guide,
Our empty rifles with our rods are tied.

LIX.

Oh ! for the painter's magic art and hand,
 To catch the picture opening to the eye,
As out we shoot and leave the trembling land,
 Where the wild waters rush so madly by.
Did Nature, weary with her rougher task,
Drop this rare gem as on she sportive passed?

LX.

A long, smooth reach of pearly waters lie ;
 The rich, green forests, fringing all the shore,
Inclining gracefully, as if to spy
 Their image glassed in beauty evermore ;
No breath of air the surface stirs to send
A quiver to the boughs which o'er it bend.

LXI.

The lofty mountain seems in deep repose .
Under these noontide beams which fill the
air ;
In this bright mirror all his grandeur shows,
Quaintly reversed in the deep shadows there.
It seems a sacrilege to break the spell ;
We pause and gaze, while high our bosoms swell.

LXII.

Night finds us now at Abol-jackanagus,
Our final goal here joyfully is found ;
Weary we rest, no earthly care to plague us,
Our tents we pitch upon a rising ground.
Some sort their flies, proceed their lines to bend,
Others prepare the mountain to ascend.

LXIII.

A silver stream from down yon airy height,
Soft rippling o'er the sands sweet music makes,
Joining the stately river, calm and bright,
Which, like a mother, to her bosom takes ;
Home of the speckled beauties, where they play,
Flash their bright sides and leap to take their prey.

LXIV.

I joint my rod, reel on the silken line,
Adjust my leader, tie the snooded flies,
Push the light birch out where the waters join.
A graceful sweep ! They light ! Ha, there's "a
rise !"
He snaps, I strike, the whizzing reel loud sings ;
I check, he leaps, sheer out of water springs.

LXV.

He shakes his head ; in vain, the barb is fixed ;
Madly he dashes, gives a fearful strain ;
He leaps aloft ; his gold and crimson mixed
Flash in the sunlight ; off he starts again ;
Hold hard ! the supple rod meets butt and tip ;
He yields—the net I now beneath him slip.

LXVI.

There in the birch the beauty lies in sight,
A cubit long, his jaws extended wide,
His quivering fins, coal black, but tipped with white,
Crimson and gold, spot all his upturned side.
Poor victim of false confidence, too late
He finds a barb hid by a tempting bait.

LXVII.

O Walton, patron of "the gentle art !"
Whose stirring pages, read in days "lang syne,"
With love of angling fired my youthful heart,
And cherished still, though past my early
prime.
Yet, not in Avon or the winding Dee,
Wast thou permitted rarer sport to see.

LXVIII.

Ah ! many an angler flings the gaudy fly
Upon life's sparkling waters. Ardent youth,
Unwary, snap the lure to Passion's eye,
Too late to find 'twas semblance and not truth.
Enchanting songs the tempting sirens sing,
While gilt and tinsel hide the fatal sting.

LXIX.

A truce to sentiment ! John takes the fish
Dressing it in his most artistic style :
Anon appears a richly-flavored dish,
Hard tack and coffee flank the generous pile ;
Not Parker's best can with this dish compare,
Or Palais Royale Café show such fare.

LXX.

High noon ! Oppressive is the heated air ;
And hark ! a low, deep, distant growl is heard.
“ Pomola’s angry,” says a guide, and there
Is a deep silence ; hushed the song of bird.
Anon a sharp report breaks out, and now
A misty cloud rests on Katahdin’s brow.

LXXI.

Now all at once the unmasked batteries pour
Terrific peals ; the blinding lightnings play ;
Down pours the rain ; the rising winds loud roar ;
The forest shakes ; the lofty pine-tops sway ;
The rolling clouds fill all the air, and soon
Darkness enfolds us in its sable gloom.

LXXII.

’Tis quickly over, and the welcome sun
Smiles brightly on the tranquil flowing river —
Like some fierce battle sternly fought and won ;
The dripping leaves on bending branches
quiver ;
The mountain peaks against the clearing skies
Clear and distinct in solemn grandeur rise.

LXXIII.

Our final night at Abol. In the gleam
 Of the last camp-fire some have climbed the
 mount,
 Others have whipped the Sourdnehunk's wild stream,
 Bringing full creels which we'll not stop to
 count,
 For we must go ; the prospect's dark ahead,
 The cook announces, "We are out of bread."

LXXIV.

And such a summer evening ! The last shower
 Has cleared and cooled the hot and stifling air ;
 Under the glowing sky we feel the power
 Of the inspiring scene so wondrous fair ;
 The rising moon through the dark forest glows,
 On the smooth water trembling shadows throws.

LXXV.

The tale now falls to Henry, an old trapper,
 Familiar with these mountain streams and lakes ;
 With knapsack on his back and rubber wrapper,
 In early winter he his journey takes
 Into these mountain wilds to camp, and bring
 His pack of peltries out in early spring.

HENRY'S STORY.

I've been a trapper, boy and man,
(Thus the old hunter's story ran,)
For more than forty winters past,
Through deepening snows and wintry blast ;
Oft up Katahdin's wooded base
The antlered moose has led the chase,
Day after day o'er crusted snow
Where the dark hemlocks thickly grow.
Oft climbed that mountain's rocky sides,
O'er gulches formed by torrent slides,
Far north where the St. Francis flows
Fed by the winter's melting snows.
I've trapped the cunning beaver there,
Set for the wily mink the snare,
Or, binding on the light snowshoe,
Chased the swift-footed caribou ;
But then, you do not care to hear
Of hunter's life from year to year.
Then listen while I briefly tell
Of what once to myself befell.
Thirty years since—it seems a dream—
I trapped on Sourdnamunk's wild stream,
And yet, though left so far behind,
As vividly upon my mind
That winter's strange events are cast
As though but yesterday they passed.

Alone I ever choose to be,
A hunter wants no company ;
His comrades are the forest trees,
Made vocal by the whispering breeze ;
'The twittering birds that gather round,
The wolf's wild bark, the rolling sound
Of some old forest tree that falls ;
Or, what the stoutest heart appalls,
When ringing on the midnight gloom
The panther's fiendlike screech will come.
Afraid? I knew not what was fear,
My tried and trusty rifle near ;
My camp door needed bolt nor bar,
No burglar ever strays so far.
Each morn my traps I visit, then
Bring to the camp my game, and when
'The morning's work is done, I bind
'The snowshoes to my feet to find
'The beat of moose or track of deer
To yield my table's homely cheer.
At evening then my traps rebait ;
'The supper o'er, my pipe I take,
Stir up my camp-fire's cheerful glow.
My winter days thus come and go.

'That winter when my tale appears,
The coldest was for forty years ;

I knew it by the thickening fur,
The Indian's true thermometer ;
I knew it by the mists which rose
From rapid streams which never froze ;
The loud report of bursting trees,
The rending rocks the frost king cleaves.
A storm, the like I never knew,
Like demons wild the north winds blew ;
Deep, and still deeper fell the snow,
The burdened trees were bending low.
For days my paths I failed to explore,
By drifting snows so covered o'er.
Close in my camp, my peltries dried,
With food and fuel well supplied,
Content I eat, and smoke, and doze,
And wait the angry tempest's close.
One night, the day's work done, I lay
Musing the sluggish hours away ;
I had not for the night retired,
But lay, by some past scenes inspired,
Of dangers met and perils past.
My fitful fancies flitting cast
Weird shadows on the cabin's wall,
As the dull flames would rise and fall,
When, suddenly, a woman's form
Appeared, as if to shun the storm ;
An Indian woman, thinly dressed,

Her bony hands her bosom pressed,
Her hollow cheeks, disheveled hair,
And sunken eyes, showed dark despair ;
Her bloodless lips, compressed and thin,
Her faded form, her shriveled skin,
Though from her lips no accents broke,
The demon Famine all bespoke.
I am not timid, well you know,
And yet I felt my blood to flow
Back to my heart ; an icy chill
Through all my frame began to thrill.
I quailed before those burning eyes,
I vainly strove to speak or rise ;
My tongue to move refused, my hand
Rebelled against the will's command.
I lay, it seemed an age, and gazed.
One arm, at length, she slowly raised,
Pointed due north, and murmured, " Go !"
Then vanished in the blinding snow.
I sprang and opened wide my door ;
The spotless snow no footprint bore.
Vainly my efforts all were bent
To learn from whence or where she went ;
Went back, my camp-fire fed, and lay,
Restless, until the break of day.
I rose and searched the forest round,
Yet sign or footprint nowhere found ;

Strove to dismiss the frightful scene,
Saying 'twas but a nightmare's dream,
Or, it might be, no doubt 'twas due
To that late dish of muskrat stew.
All day I mused the matter o'er,
Saying, 'twas that, and nothing more.

The storm was o'er. Through all the day
I cleared the drifted snow away ;
Brought in my fuel for the night,
Prepared fresh pitchwood for a light ;
My traps reset, and, supper o'er,
Weary I sought my couch once more.
I may have slept, or dozed at least,
When a shrill voice cried, " Henry Priest !"
I started. God in heaven ! As plain
As you I see that form again ;
Her dark eyes glowed with angry glare,
A fleshless arm she raised in air,
Pointed up north with gesture wild,
In hollow accents said, " My child !"
She vanished — how I waited day,
How passed those wretched hours away,
I need not tell ; it came at last,
A night like that I ne'er had passed.
But ere the first bright beams betrayed
The coming day, my plans were laid.

Up north, I heard, some Indians there
Had camped in search of hunter's fare.
Early with food my pack supplied,
My snowshoes to my feet I tied,
Strapped my warm blankets to my back,
And started on a northern track,
Resolved to solve this troubled dream.
I sought and struck St. Francis' stream,
Crossed Umbezooksis' frozen lake,
Its northern outlet then I take,
Still pushing on till setting sun
Warned me my hard day's toil was done.
I camp; but soon as morning light
Threw its first beams upon my sight,
I start; but ere the midday sun
I felt my task was nearly done.
Signs which a hunter's eye well knew —
A trap I from the water drew,
"A dead-fall" saw; a camp must be
Not far away; a blazed tree
I struck and kept the trail, when, lo!
A wigwam, covered half by snow!
No beaten track led to the door,
No foot had crossed the threshold o'er
Since the great storm of snow which shut
Almost from sight that humble hut.
I entered — horrors! There she lies,

The form that twice had met my eyes,
 Wrapped in her blanket's scanty fold,
 Midst sifting snows, now dead and cold.
 On her stilled breast a mass of fur ;
 I looked, I thought I saw it stir ;
 At once unrolled it — lo ! a child
 Stirred, woke, looked up, and faintly smiled ;
 No fuel, food or fire within,
 Alone for days and nights she'd been ;
 Her husband perished, starved or drowned,
 No hunter's foot the hut had found ;
 She stripped her furs her babe to warm,
 And perished in that fearful storm.
 I hastened then a fire to raise,
 The hut soon felt the rising blaze,
 Then fed the famished child, and gave
 The mother's form a snowy grave,
 Wrapped the poor waif in furs, and back
 Started upon my homeward track.
 How I the little stranger kept,
 How fed it, watched it when it slept,
 How brought it to my humble home,
 Where she is now a woman grown,
 I need not tell ; but whence she came,
 Or what her tribe, or what her name,
 None knew. Enough ! I saved her life.
 You doubt my tale ? — go ask my wife.

His tale was done ; our waning fire burned low ;
The ghostly shadows, fitful, come and go ;
We rise, a sigh, "Good night," a silent prayer,
And sleep, sweet sleep, absorbed each bosom's care.

LXXVI.

Now down the river gliding on the tide,
We reach the rapids, shoot the fearful pass,
Raised on a mountain billow now we ride,
Now sink and plunge into the seething mass,
While all around the waters boil and roar,
Break on the trembling rocks and shake the shore.

LXXVII.

Like frightened steeds the forest trees rush by,
While the mad waters wildly leap and dance
As the light birches o'er the rapids fly
After the leader in his swift advance,
While the live echoes in the tall cliffs ring,
As on the breeze our joyful shouts we fling.

LXXVIII.

Now the bold leader shoots into the lake,
Sweeps round to watch the others take the fall ;
Onward we drive the venturous leap to take,
Then backward send the soul-inspiring call ;
Bounds each glad heart with sense of peril fired,
While the blood leaps with life's fresh pulse inspired.

LXXIX.

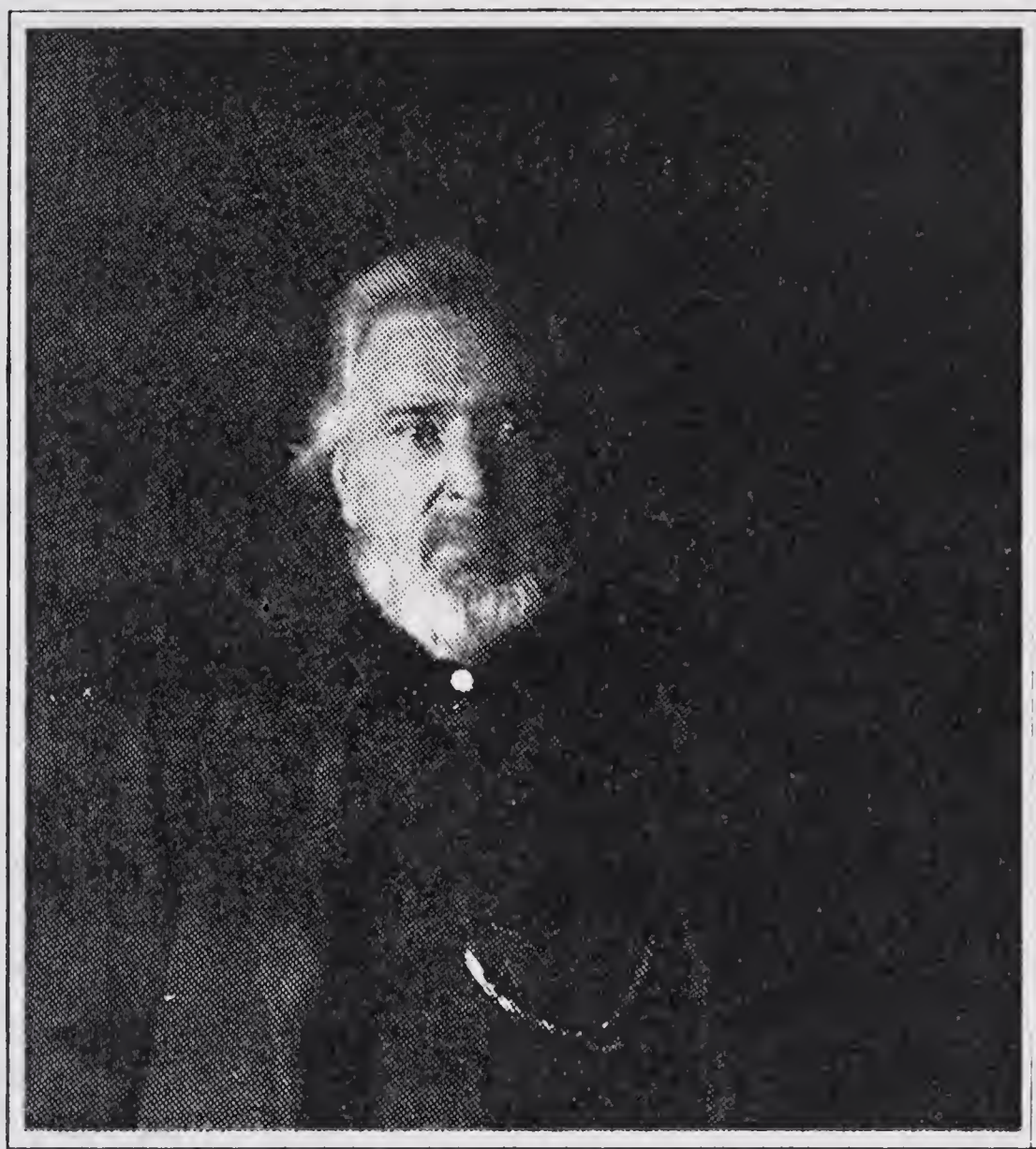
Through the lagoon we reach Lake Millinocket,
Queen of the woods, with her three hundred
 isles ;
Bordered with evergreen, a gem-set locket,
 Which King Katahdin's solitude beguiles ;
A glorious mirror, where the monarch's face
In changing moods the dancing shadows trace.

LXXX.

Our summer voyage is ended, and no more
 Skims o'er the fairy lakes our birch canoe ;
No more the balmy forests we explore,
 Or cast the fly, or golden sunsets view ;
Yet life's stern battle ne'er shall break the spell ;
My faithful guide, my birch canoe, farewell !

LXXXI.

Left, not forgotten ; ever when the brain,
 Wearied with labor, with hot fever burns,
And the strained nerves quiver with racking pain,
 When thought, exhausted, from the hard task
 turns,
To you I fly, O soothing power, for rest,
As the tired dove flies to its sheltering nest !



HENRY PRIEST 1828 -1909

AFTERWORD

By Sheldon W. Priest

This Afterword is dedicated to my great grandfather, Henry Priest, whose photograph has been added to this reissuing of Mark Trafton's *The Birch Canoe*. Because only a small number of *The Birch Canoe* was printed in 1892, members of the Priest family have searched for years to find a copy. This facsimile was photocopied from the book that was located in the Fogler Library at the University of Maine. It was donated to the University by Mr. James Vickery of Bangor.

My interest in this book is because Henry Priest was one of the four guides who accompanied the Reverend Mark Trafton on the canoe trip up the west branch of the Penobscot River. The Reverend Mark Trafton made his trips to the area between 1860 and 1880, whereas the well-known American naturalist and essayist, Henry David Thoreau, made his last trip to the area in 1857. The book Trafton wrote, *The Birch Canoe*, is highly valued by the Priest family because it gives us a greater insight into the life of Henry Priest.

We were able to identify two more of the guides. Ben York lived in Nicatou. We contacted members of his descendants who believe that he was the guide that told the story to the "Lunk-soo."

"John of Nicatou full six feet four" is probably John Neptune, born in 1847. The legend of "Lover's Leap" has been passed down through many generations in the Penobscot nation.

The research into the genealogy of the Priest family was started too late, so little is known of Henry's life from 1828 to 1855. There is one theory that Henry spent much of his youth living with the Indians. If so, this accounts for his keen knowledge of wilderness life. In 1862, Henry and his wife, Mary Shorey Priest, moved to Nicatou and in 1877, Henry was one of the signers of the petition for the Medway charter. Henry and Mary had seven children, only four of which survived.

The legacy of the "Maine Guide" was passed down the Priest line through the next three generations. My grandfather, Horace E. Priest, guided for many years in the Moosehead Lake area where he was known as being a great bear hunter. His five sons became hunters, trappers and guides. My father was Horace F. Priest.

The life of a sportsman was in the hands of his guide while exploring the Maine woods. From years of experience, the guide knew the dangers, the best places to fish, where to hunt, where to camp, how to cook, and, equally important, how to tell stories and legends around the evening campfire.

Very often the relationship between the guide and sportsman extended to the guide's family. It is interesting to note that Henry's daughter gave her son the middle name of Trafton in honor of her husband's friend. Still today, we recall our excitement at Christmas when gifts were received from those sportsmen who had great respect for their Maine Guide.

Throughout *The Birch Canoe*, the Reverend Trafton reveals the contrast of life in the city and the quiet, peaceful life he enjoyed on his trips in Northern Maine. The forests, lakes, and mountains are still there, but, for the most part, the pioneer spirit has been lost. We are, therefore, very grateful to those, like Mark Trafton, who have preserved this spirit for future generations through the written word.

Respectfully submitted, Sheldon W. Priest, Lincoln, Maine, August 1996

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author of this facsimile and Afterword, with the risk of missing someone, wishes to acknowledge the help of those who have made this printing of "*The Birch Canoe*" possible:

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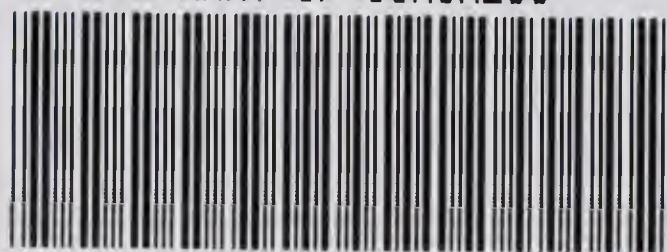
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